

Aisle 4, Porter, Indiana

Eric Ellis

It's as simple as the slip of the lips.
Some say tongue, but I've seen
everything.

 Wrapped in plastic.
Supermarket cold-cuts, sweating
chilled, sedentary.

 And maybe
they tell tall tales at night, when
the pale tile floors are no longer
lighted—the bologna to the ham.
I know they're made up.

 But
That's where I heard this one:
a daughter and mother hurry
two little steps fitting comfortably
inside mother's stride. Her sneakers
blinked on fire, flashing red
at the heels, like an emergency.

And by the slip of the lips, mind
you,

 mother calls out to the girl,
who is falling behind and unable
to keep up...

 "Hurry up, Claire."

But Claire isn't right. No, now
the steel-clattered cart, full of
bread, eggs, all things white—
crystalline. Unbroken.

 Claire
is not her name.

From my post
by the produce, I can't tell if
the mother knows her sin, or if
the daughter's chest splinters...

My tongue feels heavy; it needs
to be swallowed or caressed, told
everything's alright because
a name is the first thing
we are given, and the
only thing we have.